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SIPDIS

STATE FOR H - HEATHER HOPKINS AND EUR/SE

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: Scenesetter for Codel Hastert

Ref: STATE 247385

1. (SBU) Summary: Your visit to Turkey comes at a bumpy period in the bilateral relationship, in large measure connected with developments in Iraq. This message provides a brief overview of the state of bilateral relations, cooperation in Iraq, Turkey's EU accession prospects and the state of the economy. End Summary.

The Bilateral Relationship

2. (SBU) Bilateral relations have entered another choppy period. The Turks are freely criticizing U.S. policy in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East, but do not offer constructive alternatives. A barrage of media disinformation about Falluja and U.S. actions in general in Iraq -- fanned by statements by PM Erdogan and by Foreign Minister Gul alleging excessive use of force and civilian casualties - is creating negative public opinion. Some observers have characterized the general attitude in Turkey toward the U.S. and our role in the world as the most negative in memory.

3. (SBU) The negative Turkish attitude towards the U.S. reverberates in other areas. During a recent visit by Greek Orthodox Americans to discuss religious freedom, Turkey dug in its heels reiterating its resistance to reopening of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Halki Seminary and the ecumenical nature of the Patriarchate in Istanbul (an ecumenical nature recognized in Orthodoxy since the sixth century). The delegation's visit set off a round of accusations that the U.S. refused to respect "Turkish sensitivities" and had an ulterior motive.

Iraq

4. (SBU) Turkey shares our goals for Iraq: a secure and stable, democratic country, united and territorially whole. To that end, Turkey has provided valuable assistance and cooperation. Ankara offered to send peacekeeping troops to Iraq in October 2003, approved the use of Incirlik Air Base for tankers to refuel aircraft on support missions for both Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), authorized the transit of US troops from Iraq on rotation out, and permitted the transit of supplies for our forces and humanitarian goods. Turkey is also active in reconstruction efforts, including providing electricity for Iraq and training Iraqi diplomats, and has offered senior military leadership training in Turkey as its contribution to NATO's Iraq training mission.

5. (SBU) This cooperation is provided despite the fact that our actions in Iraq are highly unpopular with the Turkish public. Many Turks in and out of government worry about the fragility of Iraq's territorial integrity, fearing that the Kurds in the north aspire for independence and that the tensions between Sunni and Shia Arabs might become intractable. The Turks insist on interpreting U.S. failure to date to go directly after the Kurdish PKK terrorist organization in northern Iraq, the friendly U.S. attitude toward northern Iraqi Kurdish leaders Barzani and Talebani, and the U.S. view that the number of Turkmen in Iraq is significantly lower than the figure cited by Turkey as "evidence" that the U.S. supports both the PKK and an independent Kurdish state. The future of oil-rich Kirkuk is a particular source of concern, as the return of Kurds forcibly expelled by Saddam could disrupt an uneasy balance between resident Arabs and Turkmen, the latter with whom the Turks feel a bond of kinship. The Turks have gone on record supporting the IIG and full participation in elections, which they want to see move forward by January's end.

6. (SBU) More recently, the rising number of Turkish

truckers abducted and executed in Iraq has raised concerns among the public and Turkish officials. To address this issue, the first trilateral US/GOT/IIIG talks on security in Iraq were held on November 30.

Counter-Terrorism/Non-Proliferation

17. (SBU) The Turks have been an active partner on other fronts in the global war on terrorism and international security: Our militaries coordinate assistance to Georgia and Azerbaijan, improving their abilities to protect important energy transportation routes. Turkey subscribes to every arms control arrangement it is eligible to join, including the Proliferation Security Initiative. Ankara has been supportive of international efforts to press Iran to meet its commitments to the IAEA. The Turkish military's Partnership for Peace Training Center provides counterterrorism and other training to personnel from PfP partner countries. The military has recently established a NATO Center of Excellence for the Combat Against Terrorism that will provide more specialized training opportunities for both NATO partner nations and alliance members. And Turkey will again assume the command of ISAF in Afghanistan in February for a six-month period during which they will significantly increase their contribution to this important NATO mission.

EU Accession

18. (SBU) The European Commission in its October 6 report recommended the EU open accession talks with Turkey. At the December 17 Summit, the EU is widely expected to follow through on this recommendation by setting a date for talks. This would be a major step forward in anchoring Turkey's future and in our strategic vision for Turkey and the region. However, the GOT is concerned about some of the conditions that may be attached to the EU offer. They worry the EU is still not committed to its membership and continues to raise barriers. For example, the EU is pressing the Turks to sign, before the Summit, a protocol extending the EU Association agreement to the 10 new EU members, including the Republic of Cyprus. GOT officials say they are willing to negotiate on this point, but insist they are not required to sign before beginning accession talks, and they tell us this is presented as a concession to and recognition of the Republic of Cyprus, something they are only willing to see as part of a settlement of the island's division.

19. (SBU) The Turks are also concerned about how the EU will define the "open ended" nature of accession talks. They recognize the successful outcome of the talks cannot be pre-determined. GOT officials say they cannot accept language indicating that Turkey may be offered something less than full membership even if it meets all accession criteria, as some (the Austrians, German CDU leader Merkel) have suggested.

110. (SBU) The EU has indicated that it plans to apply a "screening process" before opening formal talks on each chapter of the EU acquis. The Turks say they can accept this, as long as the screening begins in early 2005 and the formal talks start later in the year. However, they reject any arrangement that would postpone the start of formal talks until 2006.

111. (SBU) Many in Turkey see the U.S. and EU relationships as a zero-sum choice. They believe that relations with the EU can improve by distancing themselves from us. Others also look for a third alternative based on partnership with Russia - which was a theme in the recent Putin visit.

Economy

112. (U) The Turkish economy has recovered strongly from the financial crisis of 2000-2001 and is growing at an annual pace of around 10 percent. However, the recovery remains vulnerable due to a large current account deficit (about 5 percent of GDP) and a large debt with a short maturity structure. Unemployment and poverty remain high, and ordinary people have not felt much benefit from the overall macroeconomic improvement. Macroeconomic success has also bred a sense of complacency about the need to persist with difficult reforms, such as privatization, and reform of the banking, social security and tax systems, all of which are being addressed in a new three-year IMF standby program.

113. (U) Due to historic economic/political volatility and opaque regulatory/judicial systems, Turkey has long

received less foreign direct investment than other countries of similar size and potential. Many in the Turkish elite are convinced that there will be a flood of foreign investment if the Turks get a date for EU accession negotiations later this month. However, this is unlikely to materialize unless more is done in the area of structural reform. In addition, there appears to be a lack of appreciation for the enormous challenges Turkey will shoulder in the accession negotiations, for the fact that EU accession will affect nearly aspect of their lives, and that it may in the end be quite costly for Turkey to comply with EU directives in environmental protection and other areas.

Edelman